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ABSTRACT

Researchers have found differences in client perceptions of and judgments about experienced and inexperienced counselors. To investigate the correlates of client satisfaction in two counseling centers, one staffed primarily by trainees (CC-T) and one staffed primarily by professionals (CC-P), 464 questionnaires (107 or 26 percent at CC-T; 357 or 39 percent at CC-P) were completed by clients who used the centers' services during 1980-81. The questionnaire focused on counseling goals, counselor-client relationship, and reactions to the center and services. An analysis of the results showed that at the CC-P, clients were satisfied with all aspects of the services as opposed to CC-T clients who were less satisfied, particularly with the center itself. Satisfaction was strongly related to helpfulness, personal characteristics of the counselor (warmth, action orientation, understanding, and competence) and disposition to return to counseling. At the CC-T, overall satisfaction was more closely related to perceived counselor competence. Favorable disposition toward returning to the counseling center was higher for clients at the CC-P. (The questionnaire and table of correlations are appended.) (BL)

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Correlates of Client Satisfaction at Trainee and Professionally Staffed Counseling Centers

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Correlates of Client Satisfaction at Trainee and Professionally Staffed Counseling Centers

Differences in client perceptions of and judgements about experienced and inexperienced counselors have been reported (e.g., Greenberg, 1969; Price & Iverson, 1969; Scheid, 1976), often within analogue studies. Client satisfaction was found to be associated with the establishment of therapeutic alliance and the experience of emotional intensity within therapy (Jones & Zoppel, 1982).

In a previous study (DeVito, Beery, Shoskes, & Mixson, 1982), client ratings of helpfulness, counselor characteristics, and other aspects of counseling were compared using the same questionnaire at two counseling centers, one primarily staffed by trainees (CC-T) and the other almost entirely staffed by professionals (CC-P). The purpose of this naturalistic study is to determine whether there are correlates of satisfaction and if the correlates differ between CC-P and CC-T.

Method

Clients using the counseling centers of both institutions during the 1980-81 academic year were sent questionnaires with stamped self-addressed return envelopes. At CC-P, 920 questionnaires were sent and 357 (or 39%) were completed and returned. At CC-T, 417 questionnaires were mailed and 107 (or 26%) were returned.

The questionnaire was one originally used at the University of California-Berkeley in 1972; each year since then, it has been modified, improved, and administered to clients at that counseling center. Only the items considered to be metric and applying to both CC-T and CC-P are presented here. See Apppendix I for the Questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

As can be seen in Table 1, virtually every questionnaire item was related to satisfaction of the client for CC-P. The lack of an equal number of significant correlations at CC-T probably reflects the smaller sample size. Satisfaction appears to be strongly related to ratings of helpfulness of the counseling, to personal characteristics of the counselor, and disposition to return for counseling oneself or to refer a friend.

As can be seen from the right-hand column in Table 1, there were two correlations that differed significantly between the two institutions. Overall satisfaction was more closely related to perceived counselor competence at CC-T. This finding seems to highlight the previous finding that clients at CC-P usually gave significantly higher ratings than those at CC-T. Apparently, the competence of the trainees is an especially important determinant of client satisfaction at CC-T.

Satisfaction and a favorable disposition toward returning to the counseling center were more closely related at CC-P than at CC-T. Given the significantly higher mean satisfaction at CC-P previously reported (DeVito et al 1982), it makes sense that the greater the satisfaction, the more one is likely to avail oneself of the service in the future should the need arise.

References

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Table 1

Correlations Between Overall Satisfaction and Other Evaluation Items; Significant Differences Between the Correlations at the Two Facilities

Item Keyword(s)	Counseling Center Staffing: Professional n	Professional r	Trainee n	Trainee r	Za/
Counseling Goals (Ratings of Helpfulness)					
educational counseling	153	.559*****	42	.441**	.875
career counseling	178	.490*****	58	.583****	- .849
personal counseling	237	.652*****	47	.747*****	-1.142
Counselor Ratings					
warm-coldb/	337	-.367*****	98	-.491*****	1.308
passive-active	337	.340*****	95	.380***	- .391
understood-misunderstoodb/	334	-.566*****	99	-.611*****	- .601
incompetent-competent	333	.412*****	98	.692*****	-3.544***
Other Aspects of Contact					
receptionist	335	.161**	97	.130	.278
first appointment	340	.153**	98	.238*	- .761
urgent appointment	302	.191***	78	.204	- .106
subsequent appointments	299	.126*	60	.348**	-1.634
test interpretation	153	.447*****	70	.354**	.762
General Reactions					
return to center	338	.794*****	99	.651*****	2.644**
return to counselor	338	.730*****	89	.778*****	- .920
refer a friend	340	.755*****	99	.724*****	.595

a/Z is the difference between the two correlation coefficients, after Fisher Z-transformation.

b/Lower ratings are more favorable for these items.

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001
****p<.0001
*****p<.00001

Appendix I

Questionnaire

I. Counseling Goals

Listed below are several reasons which students have for coming to the Counseling Center. Read each one and if the reason did not apply to you, check the space labelled "did not apply." For those reasons that did apply, make a check on the line which best indicates the degree to which counseling was helpful in dealing with those concerns.

	did not apply	COUNSELING WAS: not at all helpful				extremely helpful
I CAME FOR COUNSELING TO OBTAIN HELP WITH:						
educational or academic concerns	____	____	____	____	____	____
career, vocational concerns	____	____	____	____	____	____
personal, social, emotional concerns	____	____	____	____	____	____

II. Contacts with your Counselor

Below is a list of adjectives which we would like you to use in giving your impression of your counselor. Read each set of descriptions and place a check ( ) in the space on the scale that most accurately expresses how you felt about your counselor. Then please express in your own words what you liked or disliked about your counselor. If you saw more than one counselor, please rate the last counselor you saw.

COUNSELOR'S NAME: _____

The counselor:

1.	was warm	____	____	____	____	____	was cold and distant
2.	was passive	____	____	____	____	____	was active
3.	understood me	____	____	____	____	____	misunderstood me
4.	seemed incompetent	____	____	____	____	____	seemed competent

Appendix I

Questionnaire (Continued)

III. Other aspects of your contact with the Counseling Center

Please check the most appropriate response.

	did not apply	strongly disagree				strongly agree
1. My experience with the receptionist was positive	___	___	___	___	___	___
2. I was able to see a counselor for my first appointment within a reasonable time.	___	___	___	___	___	___
3. I was aware that if I was urgently in need of seeing someone, I could have had an appointment sooner than would ordinarily be the case.	___	___	___	___	___	___
4. I was able to make subsequent appointments within a reasonable period of time.	___	___	___	___	___	___
5. I found the tests, as interpreted to me, to be helpful in understanding myself.	___	___	___	___	___	___

IV. General Reactions

1. If the need were to arise, I would:

	strongly disagree				strongly agree
a. like to return to the Counseling Center	___	___	___	___	___
b. like to return to my counselor	___	___	___	___	___
c. refer a friend to the Center	___	___	___	___	___

2. My overall experience with the Counseling Center was satisfactory ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

Note. For Part 1 of the questionnaire, the responses were "not at all helpful," "minimally helpful," "moderately helpful," "very helpful," and

"extremely helpful." The three middle gradations are excluded above due to space constraints; they did, however, appear on the actual questionnaire which had different page dimensions.